

Final Report for Period: 05/2009 - 04/2010**Submitted on:** 06/07/2010**Principal Investigator:** Kirkman, Robert J.**Award ID:** 0646739**Organization:** GA Tech Res Corp - GIT**Submitted By:**

Kirkman, Robert - Principal Investigator

Title:

Standard Research Grant: Stuck with the Dominant Urban Form? Technology and the Limits of Ethics in the Built Environment

Project Participants**Senior Personnel****Name:** Kirkman, Robert**Worked for more than 160 Hours:** Yes**Contribution to Project:****Name:** Noonan, Douglas**Worked for more than 160 Hours:** Yes**Contribution to Project:****Post-doc****Graduate Student****Name:** Smith, Heather**Worked for more than 160 Hours:** Yes**Contribution to Project:**

As GRA, Heather Smith worked on the project until August 2008. She conducted archival research and summarized it in an extensive report. She was also involved in coding transcripts coding transcripts of interviews conducted under a previous project.

Name: Cox, William**Worked for more than 160 Hours:** Yes**Contribution to Project:**

As GRA, Matt Cox (as he is known), joined the project in mid-August 2008; he has conducted and transcribed interviews, and participated in development and (currently) pilot-testing of an online survey.

Undergraduate Student**Technician, Programmer****Other Participant****Research Experience for Undergraduates****Organizational Partners****Other Collaborators or Contacts**

Jennifer Chirico, Georgia Institute of Technology

Activities and Findings

Research and Education Activities:

In the first year, we completed the first phase of our project, which involved extensive archival research into the Atlanta BeltLine project, its prospects, and possible obstacles to its completion. This included a series of reports and white papers from various organizations involved in the process, as well as a search of newspaper archives for articles and editorials concerning the project.

When we submitted our first report, we were in the midst of the second phase of our project, returning to transcripts of interviews conducted in 2003 as part of an earlier project. We secured IRB approval for this phase of the project prior to beginning. The PI has completed a qualitative analysis of the transcripts, looking for subjects' awareness of factors that complicate or confound decision making and action in the built environment, as well as their perception of ways of overcoming such obstacles.

In the second year, the co-PI and GRA undertook a quantitative coding of the transcripts.

In that same year, we also completed the third phase of the project, 24 new interviews with individuals around the Atlanta Metropolitan Area regarding the BeltLine. The GRA on the project transcribed the interviews, and the PI analyzed them using the same qualitative procedure used in phase two.

By the end of the second year, we had moved on to design an online survey and subject it to pilot testing.

In the extension period of the grant, we implemented an online survey, receiving a total of 946 responses from individuals throughout the Atlanta area.

We have begun our analysis of the data, which holds much promise, and have prepared a preliminary report to send to survey respondents who requested it.

Findings:

Overall, the major findings of the study thus far are still quite preliminary.

First, we have identified an interesting and prominent pattern in how individuals' express the constraints or 'stuckness' facing urban form. There is a strong tendency for subjects to point to other individuals' choices as the reason for our being stuck with the current city. Rarely, if ever, do subjects see the problem as arising from attributes of a broader system (the socio-technical ensemble) or from their own choices. It's others' fault, not their own. Moreover, people do not perceive broader social, economic, or political forces at play in shaping and inhibiting their own choices.

Second, we have observed that neither information about the BeltLine nor socio-economic status appear to be strong predictors about individuals' faith in the BeltLine as a transformative project. This applies to the respondents' opinion about the BeltLine project changing the city's form or their changing their own behavior in response to the BeltLine. These impressions are independent of the information treatment in the survey, self-reported familiarity with the BeltLine, and most socio-economic status indicators. (They do appear to depend significantly on age and time lived in the Atlanta area, with newcomers being much less 'stuck' than others.)

These preliminary findings speak to this research project's original hypotheses about the sources of stuckness in the general population. They are, however, still preliminary. As we analyze the collected data and produce papers for publication, these findings are likely to be greatly refined and may change substantially.

We are currently preparing a journal article, under the working title 'Urban Form and Individual Responsibility', for submission to the journal Planning Theory. This will be an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of our project as they have been refined by our research.

We are planning to produce a series of journal articles in the coming months, as our data analysis proceeds. Topics for these articles will include:

- perception of the sources of 'stuckness'
- perception of 'stuckness' in self and others
- individuals v. systems in perception of 'stuckness'
- implications of our research for efforts to catalyze change in urban form
- is stuckness good or bad? Historical Preservation v. The BeltLine

Training and Development:

The PI, who has training in philosophy, has continued to refine his skills in qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, following something like Geertz's method of 'thick description'; he has also learned the uses and some of the techniques of quantitative coding, survey design, and even (gulp) statistics.

The material and data collected from this research project has informed classroom teaching for the Co-PI, who teaches graduate courses in environmental economics. Insofar as consistent with the guidelines approved by the Institutional Review Board, this research (data and findings) will continue to inform students in future years.

The first graduate assistant gained experience in conducting archival research and in writing and revising a synthesis report. The second graduate assistant gained experience conducting interviews and in designing survey instruments.

Outreach Activities:

We offered survey respondents the option of having us send them a preliminary report on the results of the survey. We are preparing that report, with plans to send it out in the next week or two.

We have also presented research at academic conferences and workshops. These presentations include:

Douglas Noonan. 'Speculative Justice: Distributional Consequences of a Greenbelt Project.' Invited presentation at the UREE Colloquium, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University. 24 September 2008.

Douglas Noonan. 'Speculative Justice: Distributional Consequences of a Greenbelt Project.' Invited presentation at the PERC Lone Mountain Forum on Markets for Land and Pollution, Big Sky, MT 2 ? 5 October 2008.

Robert Kirkman, 'Systems Imagination and the Prospects for Atlanta's BeltLine Project,' Annual Meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 2009.

Douglas Noonan. 'Legal Challenges, TIFs, and a Greenbelt Project: Lessons in Timing and Mismatches.' (with Jennifer Chirico) Presented at the Society for Environmental Law and Economics meeting at Emory University School of Law, Atlanta, GA. 27 ? 28 March 2010.

Robert Kirkman and Douglas Noonan. Guest lectures on 'sustainability and the BeltLine' in CP6233 ? Sustainable Urban Development (instructor: Catherine Ross). April 7, 2010.

Journal Publications**Books or Other One-time Publications**

Robert Kirkman, ""The Limits of Ethics"" (2010). Book, Published
Collection: The Ethics of Metropolitan Growth: The Future of Our Built Environment
Bibliography: London and New York: Continuum

Douglas S. Noonan, "Amenities Tomorrow: A Greenbelt Project's Impacts over Space, Time", (). Book, Accepted
Editor(s): H. Spencer Banzhaf
Collection: Markets for Land and Pollution: Implications for Environmental Justice
Bibliography: in negotiation

Web/Internet Site**Other Specific Products**

Contributions

Contributions within Discipline:

Our work is and will be significant to several disciplines, including philosophy, economics, technology studies, and urban planning. The research project sheds new light on a serious practical problem: the difficulty of thinking and acting ethically in complex situations. We introduce the notion of 'stuck', not as a new bit of jargon, but as an easily understood term for a common set of experiences. As such, it helps to construct a bridge among these disciplines ? something that is sorely lacking in scholarly work on urban affairs and fostering further transformative scholarship.

The research makes three distinct contributions to a growing movement in environmental ethics toward what is called a phenomenology of moral experience. First, we are adding to the sparse literature of environmental ethics as to whether and why it may be difficult to think and act ethically in particular situations; the experience of being stuck is a direct challenge to some assumptions made by environmental theorists and activists regarding the possibility and efficacy of changing the way people think. Second, we are adding to the also relatively thin environmental ethics literature concerning ethics in the built environment; our project brings the phenomenology of moral experience to urban and suburban environments understood as the environments of most immediate concern to most Americans. Third, we are informing the phenomenology of moral experience with empirical research into the question of how ordinary residents of urban and suburban areas see their own situation and the possibilities for and obstacles to change.

Contributions to Other Disciplines:

We also intend to publish our research in scholarly journals that specialize in urban affairs and policy. We expect that our publication of our research findings will be innovative, as a unique combination of an environmental ethicist and an economist co-authoring with novel empirical results. The findings from our survey about a major, transformative, and arguably unique urban renewal project will offer novel results in their own right. Seeing them through the lenses of a philosopher and an economist, simultaneously, should make a noticeable splash across fields.

Contributions to Human Resource Development:

Contributions to Resources for Research and Education:

Contributions Beyond Science and Engineering:

We expect our research project will contribute, indirectly, to guiding the development of the BeltLine ? a project that will take in excess of 10 years to complete. Research on the BeltLine has led to greater involvement by the senior personnel with the BeltLine, and these connections are likely to lead to future influence that is informed by the research findings. For example, the Co-PI is a major partner in the group (out of Georgia Tech) that the BeltLine governing body has commissioned to provide decision support services. The empirical results from the residential survey will undoubtedly directly inform analyses about the continued development and implementation of this major brownfield-to-greenbelt project. More than simply guiding the technical aspects of the project, the results stand to inform solution to the deeper social problems related to the BeltLine implementation and urban renewal in Atlanta generally.

Conference Proceedings

Categories for which nothing is reported:

Organizational Partners

Any Journal

Any Web/Internet Site

Any Product

Contributions: To Any Human Resource Development

Contributions: To Any Resources for Research and Education

Any Conference